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SUBJECT: NDI SUPPORTS IRAQI WOMEN'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

KIRKUK 00000052 001.2 OF 002

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Act before release.

11. (C) SUMMARY. A National Democratic Institute (NDI) Program
Manager for women's issues told IPAO's in late February that
Iraqi women had not yet obtained an independent voice in
political parties. NDI works with women from all Iraqi
political parties to implement constitutional provisions
advancing women's rights. END SUMMARY.

ENCOURAGING WOMEN TO JOIN A PARTY; CODIFYING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN
THE CONSTITUTION

12. (C) On 21 February, IPAO's met with an NGO program manager
at PRT Kirkuk to discuss women's issues in Iraq. The NDI
Program Manager (AMCIT) said that because Iraqi women did not
yet have a strong independent voice in Iraq, her group has
encouraged Iraqi women who want to engage in Iraqi politics to
first join a political party and then work through parties to
advance women's rights. Rather than lobbying political parties,
NDI persuaded Iraqi women to work directly through the legal
system to codify women's rights in the Constitution. She said
Iraqi women currently were not in a position to change
attitudes, only laws. NDI advocates women's rights in Iraq
through a caucus of political parties, which includes the
Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), Da'wa
Party, Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), and the Iraqi National Accord
(INA). Her group, based in Baghdad, has several branches
throughout Iraq, including one in Kirkuk. Female Iraqi
politicians typically were disconnected from their party
associates in Iraq's outlying areas, and thus our interlocutor
had been traveling around Iraq in part to ensure women outside
Baghdad were informed of her group's activities.

IRAQI POLITICAL PARTIES ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

13. (C) When we queried our source on the role of women in
Iraq's major political parties, she said that the Da'wa Party's
female members were the most moderate of the main Islamic
parties. The IIP women also were somewhat moderate and appeared
to be more aligned ideologically with IIP leadership than the
party's more hardline rank and file. She said female INA and
IIP members were advancing faster and assuming more leadership
posts in their parties, while the INA and Iraqi Communist Party

were most open to advocate women's rights. Iraq's two major Kurdish parties--the KDP and PUK--were fairly progressive, but our contact argued, "they would sell their women for Kurdistan."

¶4. (C) When IPAO'S asked our source which portion of politically active women in Iraq were religious versus secular, she estimated that about 35 percent were Islamic conservatives and about 15-25 percent were secular. SCIRI and Da'wa competed for the rest who fell in the middle. Broadening the scope of the discussion, she opined that the majority of SCIRI's party members (male and female) were older than 35 years, and that the party was having difficulty recruiting new members. Younger moderate Islamic activists typically were joining the Iraqi Virtue (Fadilah) party, while the younger radicals were joining the Sadrist movement.

bolstering political skills; emerging POLITICAL LADIES

¶5. (C) Recent trends suggested that Iraqi women who have filled parliament or party leadership positions have assumed those posts more often as a result of loyalty than ability. When IPAO's asked our source if she perceived Iraqi women were becoming more politically active, she suspected they were, but that they had difficulty branching out from the party line. Furthermore, Islamic parties were not recruiting women. (Comment. Iraqi women who seek involvement in political life must align themselves with existing political parties whose general principles probably agree with their own aspirations. That said, we have observed some women have joined parties because of ethnic or family ties. End Comment.)

¶6. (C) NDI's three-step process for helping Iraqi women advance in their parties was as follows: first, it helped women identify a goal and then learn how to present it to their party leaders; second, it encouraged women to support the Constitution as the mechanism to codify women's liberties; and third, NDI taught women how to achieve their goals. Our contact boasted of

KIRKUK 00000052 002.2 OF 002

her group's efforts to help Iraqi women politicians add several (unspecified) women's rights to the Iraqi Constitution draft.

BIOGRAPHIC NOTE

¶7. (C) Our source told us that Maysun al-Damluji--an INA member--was an emerging female leader, who appeared to be Ayad Allawi's spokesperson on women's issues; Safia al-Suhayl, an Iraqi National Assembly member and INA member, was another rising politician.
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